Ramadan Lessons

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(May Allah protect him)

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I seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ * أياماً مَّعدوداتٍ﴾

O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was for those before you, that you may attain Taqwa. [They are] prescribed number of days."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

All praise be to Allah, may good, pure and blessed praises. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah, alone, without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

One of the most important traits which Islam encourages is good manners. Many people often hear this term, "good manners", but if you ask them what they know about it, its definition, its key elements, its basic principles, many of them will know nothing about them. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) encouraged us to have good manners in his reply to a question about what deed will most often be the cause for people to enter Paradise, which was, "Taqwa of Allah (God-consciousness) and good manners." Having Taqwa of Allah is something between you and Allah, while good manners is something between you and other people. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Indeed a person reaches the level of one who fasts and prays through good manners." Imagine that we have a person who fasts and prays, and another who has good manners. This person who has good manners is at the same level as the one who prays and fasts. The Prophet (ﷺ) said that the heaviest thing on the scale of deeds on the Day of Judgement is good manners.

So what is the definition of good manners? This is what we will seek to learn in this lesson. How does a Muslim know, or how can a Muslim measure himself? How can he come to know whether he has good manners or not?

There is a saying of Imam Hasan Al-Basri, may Allah have mercy on him, about the definition of good manners. He defined it as three things, “Refraining from harm, doing good to others, and having a smiling face.”

“Refraining from harm…” meaning to refrain from harming others. What does it mean to refrain from harming others? It means to refrain from harming them with your speech and with your actions. Don't harm people with your words. Stay away from backbiting, talebearing, cursing and abusing, and ridiculing and mocking others. For this reason, the Prophet (ﷺ) said while describing the true Muslim and the Muslim whom Allah loves and is pleased with: “The Muslim is he who other Muslims are safe from his hands and his tongue.” People are safe from his tongue. People are harmed by those who do not restrain their tongues: cursing people… abusing people.. damning people. There are some people who always damn and backbite others. We say to this person that you have shortcomings in good manners. Why? Because you do not refrain from harming others with your words.

Also regarding harming others with one’s actions, like transgressing against the rights of others, spilling blood unlawfully, adultery and fornication, theft, beating people up. All this is considered harming others with one’s actions.

So from the meanings of good manners, is that you refrain from harming others with your words or your deeds.

Second, from the characteristics of good manners is that you do good, i.e. that you do good things to others, whether that be in regards to material wealth, doing good with your actions, or even saying good things. Helping people, doing good things to them, and trying to fulfill their needs. For example, if you see someone on the road whose car has broken down, and you stop and help him, this is from good manners, because you have done good to others. A person who does not do good to others has shortcomings in good manners.

The third characteristic of good manners which Imam Hasan Al Basri mentioned is having a soft and kind composure. This means to smile - that you smile at people. The Prophet (ﷺ) said that smiling at people is a form of charity. “Do not look down upon any act of goodness, even if it be to meet people with a happy face.” Some people never smile at others, always grumpy and frowning. He thinks that this is the height of religiousness, Taqwa, worship and asceticism that he always greets people with a frown! We say that this person has shortcomings in good manners. Smiling does not take much effort! Two centimeters from the upper lip and two centimeters from the bottom! Subhanallah! People have a natural tendency to like those who smile at them. If a person was ugly… no matter how ugly he is… if he always smiles at people, people like him, and feel comfortable with him and what he says. If a person was good-looking… white, beautiful and with beautiful eyes, a beautiful nose, and what not... but he never smiles at others, people will not like him; they do not feel comfortable around him, they do not take their problems to him, nor do they share their intimacies with him.

So we say my dear brothers, that good manners has three characteristics with which you can judge yourself: refraining from harming others, doing good to others, and smiling at others.

We ask Allah the Generous, the Lord of the Magnificent Throne, that He grant us the guidance to do what he loves and is pleased with. May Allah reward you all for being a good audience.